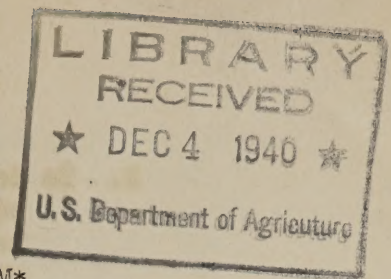


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EXTENSION SERVICE
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CHARACTER EDUCATION IN THE 4-H CLUB PROGRAM*

The 4-H Club program is the junior phase of the Agricultural Extension Service. It is open to all rural boys and girls 10 to 20 years of age who agree to carry a farm, home, or related project in which they are interested. Membership is voluntary. Those who are interested are organized into a club with an adult person acting as the adviser. All members of a group may be carrying the same project or they may be carrying several different projects. The group has a constitution and bylaws and a program. The program is of two parts. Each member has a program for carrying out his project, and the group develops a program of activities for all members. This group program consists of meetings, trips, tours, and recreational activities. There is no set form. Each group works out its program under the guidance of the adviser in line with the interests and needs of the members. The will of the majority governs.

There is also a county and a State program of activities. The work in the county is under the supervision of the county extension agent or agents. In a majority of the counties of Ohio the agents have a group of men, women, and older youth as a committee to aid in determining plans and policies and to assist in carrying out the program.

Character Defined

In this set-up, what is there that contributes to the development of character? But first, let us consider what character is. Allers in Psychology of Character says, "Character is the factors determining the individual's choice of values. The manner in which he appreciates values determines his character. The character of a man is the justification of his action, something in the nature of a rule or maxim." Faris in Nature and Human Nature says, "Character is such an organization of the tendencies to modes of action that others can depend on man's future activity and count on his behavior."

The report of the National Education Association committee on character education sets up these objectives for character education:

1. To develop socially valuable purposes, leading in youth or early maturity to the development of life purposes.

* Prepared by W. H. Palmer, State club leader, Ohio, as a part of his work in professional improvement at the Ohio State University while on sabbatic leave.

2. To develop enthusiasm for the realization of these purposes, and coupled with this enthusiasm, intelligent use of time and energy.
3. To develop the moral judgment, the ability to know what is right in a given situation.
4. To develop moral imagination, the ability to picture vividly the good or evil consequences to self and to others of any type of behavior.
5. To develop all socially valuable natural capacities of the individual and to direct the resultant abilities toward successfully fulfilling all one's moral obligations.

Factors Influencing Character Development

1. The Home.

Heading the list of agencies influencing the development of character of the individual is the family. In the 4-H program the work that the individual member does on his project is done in the home or on the home farm. To start with, there needs to be parental approval of membership in the club and of the project to be carried, although in some instances this approval may not be given by both parents.

The project is undertaken by the member with the idea of demonstrating better practices and what he or she can do. As the boys and girls demonstrate their ability, the parents begin to consider them as being more mature. Frequently the club member is able to do a better job than the parent, thus enhancing the parent's appreciation of the child. The member, too, in facing the problems of his project, gains an understanding of the problems of the parent. This leads to a better understanding between parents and the member and a greater appreciation of each other's value. This is nicely illustrated in the case of the boy who wished to be a member but whose father at first would not give his consent, saying, "John would never do the work. He takes no interest in the work here on the farm. All he wants to do is loaf around and read." However, he finally gave his consent with the admonition, "If you do not take care of the pig, I'll raise you." By midsummer the father was fairly "bursting the buttons from his vest" in pride at John's success in his project. That fall John and his father formed a partnership, and John assumed the management of the swine.

Or, take the case of the girl who had no interest in the home. Getting her to do some chore, nearly always resulted in a "scrap" with her mother. After she had joined a club group, her attitude changed and she and her mother became "pals."

These are only two of many instances where parents and children have been drawn closer together, a better relationship established, and a better understanding of each other developed with the resultant of greater influence of the parents in molding the character of the youth.

2. Friends.

In Hartshorne and May's study, the second most important source of the child's knowledge of right and wrong was the child's friends. The club group consists of young people who for the most part are friends. In their working together to solve the various problems which naturally arise in carrying out their program, there is an exchange of experience which results in good for all.

3. Club Groups.

In many primitive groups we find that as the child entered the adolescent period there were elaborate ceremonies in which he had to participate. These ceremonies inducted him into the adult section of the group. He was no longer a child, he was an adult and was treated as such. To a limited extent the joining of a 4-H Club has somewhat similar aspects today, although not so recognized generally. Club membership does, however, set the youth apart, for the public has begun to expect certain definite actions from 4-H members. The member undertakes a task - the project in raising pigs, dairy cattle, feeding steers, making dresses, or preparing meals - which is an adult activity. He or she is expected to do just a little better than the average, or even the best. As the member achieves in his project he is given special recognition; he is more or less accepted on the adult level as in the primitive society.

4. Group Responsibilities.

Both boys and girls are members of many of the local 4-H Clubs. In all the county-wide activities, such as camps, tours, and achievement days, both boys and girls participate. Both boys and girls help to plan the local program and county activities. The interests and needs of the members constitute the basis of the programs, and recreation is a part of each program. Thus, through the various activities such as camps, picnics, tours, achievement days, recreational evenings, and local meetings, the boys and girls are brought together in a wholesome situation which aids in their personality development. In many groups of older boys and girls, time is spent in discussing problems of personality development. All this is desirable under the guidance of an intelligent, sympathetic local adviser.

5. An Ideal or Hero.

It is natural, especially in early adolescence, for the youth to have an ideal by which he patterns his conduct. This ideal must

be concrete and may be a parent, a friend, the minister, or a character in motion pictures, novels, or in history. As 4-H Club work has developed the idea of an ideal 4-H Club member has grown up. This more or less mythical personage is given the characteristics of a very desirable individual. He is honest, truthful, trustworthy, respectful, considerate, cooperative, healthy, industrious, a good sport, plays the game fairly, plays his part in the group for the good of all. For the club member, this mythical 4-H member becomes his guide in shaping his conduct. With this ideal in mind and through the pressure of the group with a similar ideal, the individual builds these desirable characteristics into life habits.

An individual of good character is sensitive to the well-being of other individuals. The 4-H program teaches club members to do what they do, not for themselves alone but for the good of the project. The individual is personally responsible for the well-being of his animal, the condition of his garden, or the way her dress looks or the food product tastes. In addition there is a degree of responsibility to the adviser of the group and the other members not only of his local group but of all other 4-H Clubs. In other words, he is a member of a recognized group in which he plays a part, and he is recognized for what he is and does.

6. Team Demonstrations.

Another feature of the 4-H program which is a factor in the development of the individual is the demonstration. Demonstrations are of two kinds: Individual and team. In the individual demonstration the member is showing what he can do by following approved practices in his project. This gives him recognition and standing in proportion to his success. Then, too, he may show to others how he follows certain practices in his project, for example, balancing a ration, or preparing vegetables for market. This requires special preparation and the ability to speak before a group. This also gives him recognition and standing.

The team demonstration differs from the individual demonstration only in that two members instead of one work together to show the practice. The rewards of recognition and standing are the same as for the individual.

7. Project Ownership.

The products of the project, whether livestock, vegetable, or clothing, belong to the 4-H member. There is pride of ownership, and responsibility for its outcome. The member with a livestock project has had to purchase the animal or animals. This may have required a loan from a bank or credit association. The loan must be, and in every instance, has been repaid. The vegetable may be used at home or sold. The profits from the projects are frequently used to either increase the size of the project or provide for further education.

The importance of this feature (ownership) of the club program in building character should not be looked upon too lightly. John Dewey says, "Ownership stimulates a wholesome sense of responsibility which in turn is essential to good citizenship."

Other Factors Influencing Character Development

Gertrude Warren, of the United States Department of Agriculture, in Organization of 4-H Club Work, says in referring to character building: "4-H Club work is based not only on the needs and interests of 4-H Club members but on the needs of the agricultural community to which they belong. Members are led to feel that they have a useful part of the world's work to do and that in doing it they may grow mentally, socially, and spiritually; that they, as an integral part of the community, have a definite responsibility in improving their community and in making it a finer place in every way."

Hartshorne, in Character in Human Relations, after stating what 4-H members do, says: "Consequently whatever of character value there may be is inherent in the process and not added to it by ceremonies and words. The children discuss ways of doing things, not right and wrong ways, and then test their ideas by results. The social insight and habits achieved are an integral part of daily duties and economic skills. The children do the work and own the product. Character for these children in very truth is a part of living. The ideals and standards they are learning are working ideals and standards for their own activities.

"As a means of amalgamating the community, of breaking down the caste barriers between old and young, nothing better has been conceived.

"Significant as is the training which seeks to develop to use leisure wisely, it should not be confused with efforts to transform the meaning of those activities which are characteristic not of leisure, but of work. It is at this point that 4-H Club work stands out so conspicuously from that of many other groups. The members are engaged in performing social functions, not in learning isolated skills, achieving extraneous awards, or groping after impossible absolute ideals. Character as far as it is achieved is for them not a byproduct nor an ornament nor a recommendation to be used to get a job with. It is the way they do their daily task as functioning members of their community.

"No reform is either permanent or genuinely ethical which does not proceed from within the person or institution to the reformed, which is not the response of the person or the group to ideals which they have themselves evolved or espoused.

"One can see, therefore, the ethical as well as the social significance of the 4-H Clubs. They are a part of the economic and social life of the community. They are the community, working through its

youth, to rebuild itself. This process of rebuilding in response to growing standards and ideals is what character is -- those who share in it possess character in the art of sharing."

Pendry and Hartshorne in Organizations for Youth summarize the character building features of 4-H Clubs as follows:

"Because a boy must be faithful, punctual, thoughtful, humane in his care of the calf dependent upon him, and the girl who is responsible for the canning or preparation of the food for her family must be neat, careful, considerate of the tastes of others in order to accomplish her task successfully, for these reasons good character habits develop as concomitants in the procedure. The ease with which these boys and girls enter college life at the great universities attests the value of the training they have received in their club work."

Summary

4-H Club work, although not organized with character education as the specific end in view, is functioning to this end and, therefore, deserves a prominent place in this summary of character education procedures. The fact that its activities are wholly integrated with the economic life of the community is one of the fundamental causes of its great value as a character building program. Each boy or girl interested is consciously and intelligently working as part of the progressive citizenry of the county, State, or Nation. This consciousness of his own importance, and of the importance of the activity in the welfare of the community leads him to manifest those qualities of worth and integrity which make character. Moreover it may be said that 4-H Club work:

1. Brings young people in contact with live problems and with inspiring men and women through doing something worth while on the farm, in the home, or in the community.
2. Helps them to realize upon opportunities around them.
3. Tests their fitness for farm life so that only those who like farming will engage in it.
4. Trains in cooperation through a work and play program planned largely by themselves.
5. Develops leadership through tasks assumed in keeping with their abilities and for the service to others.

"By focusing their attention upon the needs of their community and the possibilities for improvement they develop a sense of responsibility that stimulates them to do and accomplish.

"Youth is motivated when he is finding joy in learning by doing under the guidance of experts or finding inspiration in companionship with those of similar interests and that satisfaction in achievement which comes to boys and girls who carefully and faithfully carry through their projects to a point of economic worth. And these values are supplemented by their concomitant character responses, industry, faithfulness, joy in work, kindliness, scientific appreciation of truth, honesty, courage, thrift."

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